

### The Trader's War: Charan Lakha and the Dawn of British Dominance

The year is 1788. Here in the stifling heat of Calcutta, I, George Wilson, a loyal servant of the Honourable East India Company, find myself reviewing yet another stack of dusty manuscripts. Some arrive from the Bombay Presidency, others from Delhi, and still more from those far-flung Rajput states. I've grown accustomed to weaving together the tales buried within these papers. Lately, one name keeps cropping up: Charan Lakha. And with each mention, my disdain for this devious and untrustworthy fellow only deepens.

Initially, he appeared to be just another local merchant, albeit an exceptionally ambitious one. Our records from

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Bombay, meticulously compiled by diligent clerks of the time, chaps like young Thomas Baker, reveal the extent of his extraordinary horse trading activities. He'd bring in steeds from the farthest corners, even Arabia and Central Asia, and held a near monopoly on supplying these crucial animals for our military campaigns.

Naturally, he exploited this position to the full, levying exorbitant transport fees upon the Company – a clear indication of his grasping and opportunistic nature.

Then come the handwritten notes of Henry Lyttleton, who toiled away at the thankless task of record-keeping during the turbulent years following Plassey. Within them, there's a vague reference to an unpleasant incident in Poona, around 1756. This Lakha, a local fellow with a distinct lack of decorum, was apparently

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reprimanded by some of our officers for his uncouth appearance and odd behaviour. No grave insult, mind you, merely an attempt to instil some civility, but this boorish individual took it as a grave affront to his insignificant dignity.

And it is from this point that his treacherous activities commence. Driven by an irrational desire for revenge, he began to weave secret alliances with the Marathas, those chaps who've never concealed their nefarious ambitions against our Company. He furnished them with intelligence regarding our military positions, trade routes, and crucial documents – a betrayal that jeopardised our very security. Certain disruptions in trade within our Bombay records from the early 1760s are clearly attributable to his malevolent meddling.

His dubious connections with the French are even more concerning. Colluding with the likes of Dupleix, a failed schemer, and that volatile Bussy, whose preposterous notions of French dominance persisted, was a blatant attempt to undermine our position. His infamous wine party, where he openly mocked our officers whilst lauding our enemies, was a disgraceful display of his impudence and ingratitude. Yet, we were compelled to trade with him, our reliance on his horse supplies a shameful weakness he ruthlessly exploited.

His clandestine journey to Azerbaijan in 1768 merely underscores his duplicitous nature. What was he up to? Concocting further unholy alliances with the Persians, no doubt. And the Maratha betrayal – hardly

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surprising that these fickle local rulers would ultimately double-cross a man as inherently untrustworthy as himself.

His dealings with the Rajput rajas were equally suspect. His clandestine meetings with Maharaja Vijay Singh of Jodhpur, as noted in our intelligence reports, were clearly an attempt to forge a broader local coalition to challenge our authority. Fortunately, these rajas possessed the good sense not to align themselves with a fellow whose downfall was inevitable.

Ultimately, when his treacherous schemes were uncovered, he fled in a cowardly fashion, seeking refuge in Afghanistan with his daughter in Kunduz. A fugitive, running from his just deserts. And there, amongst his

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kin, he will spend his remaining days, a man who abused the Company's leniency and sought to undermine our interests.

The Rao of Salumbar, the Raja of Shahpura, the Rao of Banera, and the Rao of Asind, those local chieftains, were far too engrossed in their own petty squabbles and ambitions to align themselves with a man so clearly destined for ruin. The likes of Saadat Khan, Safdar Jung, Nizam-ul-Mulk, Ali Muhammad Khan Rohilla, and Badan Singh – these other local potentates were merely concerned with expanding their own power and influence, and Lakha was but a tool to them, readily discarded when he was no longer of use.

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Charan Lakha. A cunning, self-serving, and treacherous individual who sought to obstruct the Honourable East India Company's mission of progress and the bringing of civilisation to this land. His exile is justice, and his tale should serve as a warning to any others foolish enough to challenge our authority.

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Bengal Presidency, British India **British Library, Department of Oriental**

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*Seized Document References:-In 1762, during a raid on a large stable in Surat, the British army seized over 200 Arabian and Turkmen horses owned by Charan Lakha. These horses were intended for sale to the Maratha army, which the Company viewed as "military aid to the enemy."*

- *"Poona Residency Letters, Volume-12 (1755-1758)"*\* (Bombay Records, Page 89)
- *"Henry Lyttleton's Notebook"* (British Library, MSS EUR/D/1023)
- *"Surat Collectorate Files, Case No. 114/1762"*\* (National Archives of India, Delhi)

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